

Dating for nerds



By Andre Joaquin Castillo

Rejection hurts. As SAIS nerds, the nerds of nerds, if you will, many of us are just not used to rejection. We've been admitted to one of the best grad schools in the world, and we know it. And it might go to our heads a little bit. I can tell you, my childhood dream had always been to go to Harvard, and when they rejected me out of high school, man, it stung. Thankfully, it helped put things in perspective. After that, getting rejected by a girl didn't seem like the end of the world like it had used to be.

Like succeeding in college, how to date is something that has to be learned. Sure, the opposite sex is a mysterious figure, but don't run from him! Just like taking that Trade Theory exam *could* result in a failing grade, how are you ever going to pass if you never take the time to study your Hecksher-Olin? As a proud nerd, I'll be the first to tell you that nerdiness is a good thing – just don't let that nerd-arrogant fear of rejection hold you back.

The trick to dating as a nerd is to use it to your advantage and avoid the pitfalls that plague so many would-be nerdy lovers. Remember, if you really are a nerd, your future special someone is most likely a nerd as well. That's right, someone who likes to read like you do, someone who stimulates your intellect with debates on the relevance of Weberian statehood, and someone who will actually listen to you when you passionately unravel, with Wikipedia-like erudition, the mysteries of Olympic curling. (That last one won't be me, though, so don't even try it).

In that vein, I present to you three tips to dating as a nerd.

Being a nerd is cool - but not everything that you think is cool is

This applies to two extremes that I sometimes see SAISers fall into. The first is when, stricken by the attractiveness and intelligence of someone they've found at the SAIS Happy Hour – the ideal mate! – they try hard to impress by covering up what they think is the “flaw” of their nerd-dom. This results in awkward pauses when “embarrassing” facts start to come out, followed by stilted segues, and punctuated with either silence or false bravado that brings more cringes than laughs. Desperate for an escape valve, she then turns to the first person she recognizes and...

It's game over before you've even made it out of the gate.

Sometimes this same person will respond by going to the other extreme, talking incessantly about things that are only interesting to him. No, no one cares about my childish infatuation with Marvel comics and collectible trading card games. Nor should you. So set aside your hopeless dream of finding a partner that is your exact carbon copy – it's never going to happen, nor should it – and just ask her some questions until you find something you can talk about that you're both interested in.

A girl being nice to you is a good sign – but she still may not be “interested”

Like the rest of my advice, this is important for both sexes. SAIS has an eclectic mix of cultures and personalities, and this can result in confusing signals. As library-loving nerds, physical contact can understandably make us a little giddy. But when he leans in to make a point about how he nailed his analysis of the shifting Aggregate Demand curve on his Macro exam by putting his hand on your shoulder, that may just be how he talks. Now, if he starts visibly analyzing your sloping Aggregate Supply curve, well, then you might just have something there.

Use your nerdy initiative, but respect her opinion

So she giggled hysterically when you refused to let your Budget Constraint stop you from diminishing your Marginal Utility at the last Happy Hour. Things are looking good, but then time passes and you become confused – why hasn't it progressed? You two would obviously achieve pareto efficiency together! Well, my friend, good things sometimes do not come to those who wait.

“I don't understand what's wrong!” a friend once lamented to me. “How many times have you gone out, you know, alone?” I asked. “Five, maybe six times,” he said. “Well, have you kissed her?” I asked. “No,” he said. “Well [expletive deleted] kiss her!” I exclaimed. He did, and they are now happily dating.

Don't underestimate the power of initiative – it got you to SAIS, why would you think dating would be any different?

Now if she says no, that she's not interested, that's ok too. It takes two to tango, and not every guy you like is a guaranteed match made in heaven. If you've made it this far, they clearly like you enough to spend time with you, and it's always flattering to know that someone finds you attractive. But never let a “no, thank you” make you throw away a potential friend – not to mention some of your reputation – because that special “spark” isn't mutual. They can't help it. Be grateful for the knowledge and clarity, stay civil, and keep looking.

One last note – guys, it pains me to say it, but girls still generally expect you to make the first move, so man up and do it. And ladies – don't forget that guys like initiative too. Don't be afraid to use that to your advantage.

A final note

Asymmetric information is the ruin of many a market, and the dating market is no different. Communication is key, as is self-respect, understanding, and resilience. So what if the Harvard of your romantic desires rejects you – why don't you go and do something productive about it?

Remember who you are, and embrace it. This does not mean you can't work on your annoying idiosyncrasies (I have them just like you) – those aren't who you are, those are just like the barnacles on a ship that you can, and should, clear away. Dig deep within your nerd-hood and bring out the interesting, good person that is inside you. You're a lovely person, I'm sure – so why muck it up?

The most important rule, which I cannot stress enough, is to just make an effort to make the other person feel comfortable around you. This goes for any and all relationships. I can't tell you how important this is, yet how many times I've seen it blatantly violated by some of the most intelligent of SAIS students! If you can do that, you can date virtually anyone you want. Trust me.

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